Contemporary Textile Design
Inspired by Mughal Monuments of Agra

Synopsis

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Aims and Objectives of the Research

The objective of this research is to identify historical motifs, patterns on Mughal monuments of Agra and their usage on the costumes and textiles.

With the creative mind and hands, the possibilities from historical designs are endless, which can inspire countless adaptations and a series of contemporary creations may be retranslated and re-interpreted.

Objectives

- To investigate the motifs of various monuments with regard to their origin and style.
- To identify these motifs on various traditional textiles of India.
- To study the stylization of these designs and motifs on present day textiles.
- To compare between the monumental designs on traditional and contemporary textiles.
- To create a connection between the historic and latest trends.
- To provide a framework for the design students to understand the historic foundations on which the creative practices are based.

Justification for the Study

Historical motifs and designs have begun to be used regularly in various industries. Products created in today's world play an important role in preserving cultural and historical values. Combining contemporary styles with age old designs and motifs ensures the survival of these motifs for future. The research will investigate in which area of design, the motifs used in Mughal monuments of Agra are being used today.

It would enable a transformation in a field of contemporary design, by building new and more creative connections between past and present. As rightly put in by Dr. Parul Bhatnagar, "contemporary designs are not intended to be applied solely in the development of new products. Very often they can be used with remarkable results through product adaptation of objects that might have been established over the years, but

now show signs of decline. This would imply simplifying the decoration, as well as modifying the design and style of items to suit requirement of consumers.[1]

Exploration will help young designers to nurture their creativity, to evaluate innovative and emerging technologies and enhance their individual, artistic and technical skills.

Significance of the Research

The study of Mughal monuments is very important, as it will enhance the approach of designers, "Successful textile designers bring together aspects of historical, cultural and contemporary perspectives to make their design relevant expression of the times."[2]

In recent times, the historical motifs are interpreted in modern and classical styles. Today many countries are using technology to reintroduce traditional craftwork in an attempt to revisit their own cultural roots. The aim of these countries is to introduce diversity and their own cultural identity to the world whilst remaining competitive.[3]

Designs taken from our heritage sites, along with the contemporary developments produce a remarkable ornamentation on textiles. As suggested by Dr. Parul Bhatnagar in Traditional Indian Costumes and Textiles, "A fresh modification of the old motif and style, ornamentation or design is generally how innovation is accepted in designing."[4] Fusing ancient designs with contemporary style may create masterpieces making a mark in the present day world of textiles.

The significance of monumental designs does not only represent its functionality but also the cultural values. The functional design and motifs of various Mughal monuments in Agra with regards to aesthetic aspects are represented in a form of cultural expression. "Designers have a responsibility to keep alive India's rich heritage of glorious textiles", says Deepika Govind, a Fashion Designer.[5]

Rejuvenating the classical motifs by giving it a different surface to expand, may provide these designs, a larger scope for their popularity. Infusing the motifs with new style and experimental colour palette will give these motifs a shift from ornamental décor to utilitarian use too.

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[1] (PARUL, 2005)

[2] (1-10 Technology Unit)

[3] (Tülay, 2001)

[4] (Parul, 2004)

[5] (Deepika, 2011)

Review of Literature

Today we live with legacy of cultural period devoted to the creation of beautiful buildings, which not only used to serve man's needs and still pleases the eye and refreshes the soul. In this way, Mughal architecture is full of experiences and surprises.[6]

Out of the numerous contributions of the Mughal architecture in India the most distinctive and the remarkable are the monuments of Agra; structured and designed in the 16th and 17th century with the fusion of Persian, Indian, Turkish and Islamic styles with the substantial quality and elegance.

Agra is infested with monuments in all parts of the city. The monuments are diversified from splendid Taj Mahal to the somber creation like Akbar's mausoleum at *Sikandara*. *Fatehpur Sikri* is the finest example of culmination of Hindu and Muslim architectural splendour. *Itmad-ud Daulah*, supposed to be a replica for *Taj Mahal*, is yet another fascinating structure, created with beautiful designs.

"The Mughals have ruled the sub-continent for centuries. During 15th to 18th century was their peak time. The mughal left a whole lot of pieces of their architecture so that they could be remembered. Their piece of art is still unique and no one has ever been able to make such artistic piece of art till today. Their architecture was basically Persian, Islamic and Indian. All of the monuments build by the mughal were different and had such innovative designs."[7]

"The Mughal age was not only the period of experiment and innovation but of continuation of the process of fine arts", says N. Jayapalan.[8]The most appealing exquisite feature of Mughal architecture was the impeccable and exemplary usage of carved patterns, together with inlaid patterns and painted designs on the ceilings and walls. "The chief characteristics of the early Mughal periods the ornamentation of tessellated or mosaic pattern, in various coloured stones or in glazed tiles."[9]

The most popular are mural styles are inlay, tile, stucco and mosaic. Inlay is most popular of them. This was known as Pietra-Dura (stone-hard). This art was related to Persia and adopted by the Mughals. [10]

The Mughal monumental designs in India have been the most persuasive in the fields of art and architecture. Like other forms of art, even textiles are highly influenced by these artistic and creative monumental works. Kripa Krishnan points out, "though the powerful

[6] (Rehman Abdul, 2012)
[7] (Krista)
[8] (Jayaplalan)
[9] (Abdullah)
[10] (Sharma & Gupta, 2012)

sovereigns now only exist in the pages of history, their architecture and design continues to act as a muse for designers who are re-interpreting the old motifs in new ways".[11] He further states that, be it *pacchikari* (pietra dura or marble inlay) which is leitmotif common to many mughal structures, or the myths surrounding their beautiful consorts, the empire is fertile ground for design." Krishnan affirms, "The pattern and craft perfected over centuries have been handpicked and used in a modern content to create products which are far from a literal translation."[12]

In the study of design history, we observe that motifs re-occur, with the adaptations that become a landmark. With the re-adaptations of the same designs, the entire look is reborn. History and traditions are often applied to textile design in different ways. It is commonly believed that some countries and regions of the world have quite particular received philosophies about textile design. These philosophies are often and extension of local, historical, craft attitudes, aesthetics and methods. When they are applied in the sphere of contemporary design, it can result in distinctive approaches to the use of technology, materials or imagery.[13]

One of the richest inspirational sources for designing, from the past is been the Mughal architecture. According to the famous BlogSpot, geometrical designs inspired from various Turkish and mughal monuments can be found sitting on a number of dresses and famous Mughal Jalis have found expression in many a designer's work.[14]

Rohit Sharma and Ila Gupta describe the glory, living style and beautiful architecture of mughals with their unique decoration style. As pointed by the duo, the architectural decorations reflect the taste, interest, living standards, style and customs of Mughals. These monuments are world famous for its beautiful wall decoration and the contemporary style has their roots in mughal art.[15]

Architecture and fashion may seem far from each other; in architecture designing monumental buildings are meant for a long visual life, where as fashion in clothes changes every season. However both forms are three dimensional and contain space; both are structured; both are related to fine arts and visual.[16]

Artistic re-interpretation of the monumental works of earlier centuries has become one of the key elements of modern contemporary designs. Agra's mughal monuments have created a niche for itself in the area of textile design. The modern designers have started to manipulate more and more about historical motifs in the contemporary style on modern textiles, dresses and costumes. Mughal monuments are being revived and reinvented by India's product designers. "Mughal motifs infused with contemporary designs make for

[11] (Krishnan, 2012)
[12] (Krishnan, 2012)
[13] (Bhatia, 2008)
[14] (Mazumdar)
[15] (Sharma & Gupta, 2012)
[16] (Paksoy)

statement pieces. Mughal style doesn't always translate into overtly ornate furniture or extremely busy prints, especially if the designer has used these patterns discreetly", says interior designer Sarthak Sengupta of Sahil and Sarthak Design. The patterns are extremely popular on furnishings. Product and Textile Designer Anita Dalmiya says, "Mughal Designs are timeless." "Product Designers are looking back in time to add a dash of royal opulence to your home," says Varuni Khosla.[17]

The vibrant flavor and strong aesthetic appeal of these monuments have not only inspired the Indian designers but also magnetised some of the well known designers from the rest of the world. Italian artist Idarica Gazzoni's works and motifs are inspired by and reflect the Mughal history of southern Asia. Gazzoni's collection is a modern take on traditional Mughal motifs- arabesque curves, red and white floral patterns and pointed dome shapes.[18]

Thus historical characteristic features of design seem to play a vital role in sustaining the creativity and continuity in broader aspects. Deborah Thiagarajan justifies this by stating that, "contemporary Indian designers have unique advantage. They are surrounded by a living tradition and skilled crafts people, making experimentation and change easy, relatively inexpensive, and literally at their finger tips."[19]

Brinda Suri states, "If one were to select a textile influence that has emerged stronger over the centuries the Mughal genre would be a clear winner. Its attractive motifs echo across the textile spectrum making up the bulk of admired patterns on view in the country. This especially holds true in the block prints, weaves and embroideries largely seen in the metros and regions in the north, east and west India that were once under the Mughal reign."[20] She further points out that, "According to textile designers, a design has three elements to it. First and foremost is its symmetry of structure. This is followed by the intention or thought behind a particular pattern. Finally, it is all about the way the idea has been executed. Mughal motifs stand out in being lucid in all three departments. The reason, they attract almost instantly."[21]

[17] (Mughal Magic)

[18] (Sparkles of Life sans peur, 2012)

[19] (Thiagarajan, 1999)

[20] (Suri, 2010)

[21] (Suri, 2010)

Scope of the Study

This research will evaluate the application and continuity of historical motifs and designs of Mughals as linkages, for implementation adaptation in contemporary design practices.

It will assess the interdependence between the historical and contemporary design techniques. The study will further revolutionize the developments of designs on textiles.

Limitations of the Study

The research has been limited to the study of monumental designs of Agra district. The Mughal designs are extremely rich which have been enhancing a designer for various textiles, therefore the study is being conducted on them to bring out the beauty of Agra's rich heritage.

Research Methodology

The methodological approach of this research will be a combination of two methods of research and design. The research will be exploratory and will include Primary and Secondary Data.

- **Primary Data Collection:** The primary data will be collected from various designers, export houses, production houses, printers, weavers, sellers, buyers and experts in the field.
- **Secondary Data Collection:** The secondary data will be collected by analyzing history and contemporary designs. Literature on history, contemporary designs and textiles will be referred from research articles, publications, archives, libraries, and journals related to the research will be collected, analyzed and documented.

Hypothesis

It is hypothesized that the research on Mughal monumental designs will:

- Enhance collaboration between historical designs and contemporary design practices.
- Develop technical and artistic perspectives of implementation of new and traditional techniques.

- Develop strong interfaces between research in costumes and fabrics, emphasizing the Mughal Era.

Subject Matter of Research

"The language of the stone is difficult to decipher, but once understood, it may prove one of the most authentic sources of history.

Monuments- the architectural projects of the past-preserve the most fruitful record of contemporary society; of the faith and beliefs, the aesthetic outlook and art capabilities of the contemporary people."

R. Nath (1972)

History has always been a source of inspiration for contemporary designers and artists. One such source is the Mughal Monuments. Mughal monumental designs have a long history and distinctive style, as exemplified in artifacts, paintings, woodwork, ceramics, architecture and textiles.

The contemporary style, has taken notice of this country's rich heritage of Mughal designs. "It may seem a little surprising to use an architectural building as an inspiration for fashion design, but all examples of architecture, whether traditional or contemporary, can cause creative spark to the designer. Whether it is in the overall theme of a building or just a detail, useful ideas, in the architecture can be found as inspiration to create garment structure." [22]

Historical designs and motifs provide an invaluable research. "The research enables dialogues between historic and contemporary fashion, helps to build new more complex narrations about both past and present.[23]

The Indian architecture, monuments constructed during the Mughal era, are admired worldwide for their remarkable designs. *Saleh Kambo,* a court historian of *Shahjahan* (1628-1658), while discussing the buildings frequently used the phrases such as, "*makan dilnasheen hai az nasheman hai nuzhat aafreen"*, (मकान दिलनशीं है आज नशेमन है नुज़हत आफ़रीन) which means, "heart pleasing buildings and praiseworthy mansions".[24]

The monuments are the combination of Islamic, Persian, Turkish and Indian Architecture providing a larger perspective for designs. The designs on Monuments in Agra are multicolored from the splendid *TajMahal* to sober tombs like Akbar's Mausoleum at *Sikandara*. The creative designs of colossal structures like *Buland Darwaza* and *Jodha Bai's* Palace at *Fatehpur Sikri* are worth inspiring.

[22] (Paksoy)

[23] (Deirdre, 2011)

[24] (Rehman Abdul, 2012)

In the present times of competitive market, the designers need to adapt modern practices to keep the art, design and motifs alive. The research will focus on multidisciplinary approach with the implementation of various techniques to create innovative design forms.

Some of the designs will also be experimented for the first time by digitizing the classical patterns using specialized computer software, reflecting the fusion of modern technology with historical art. This will enhance the library of classical design patterns and give fresh trend to traditional Mughal designs. These designs will be documented on CD-ROM media as the objective for further study.

Date: **Research Scholar**

Meenakshi Kumar Seth

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11. www.solobackpacker.com
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Figures

[1]

Figure 1 Sample of Inlay Pattern used in Mughal Monuments of Agra

[2]

Figure 2 A Replica of Inlay pattern

[1] www.thefullwiki.org

[2] alberthalljaipur.gov.in

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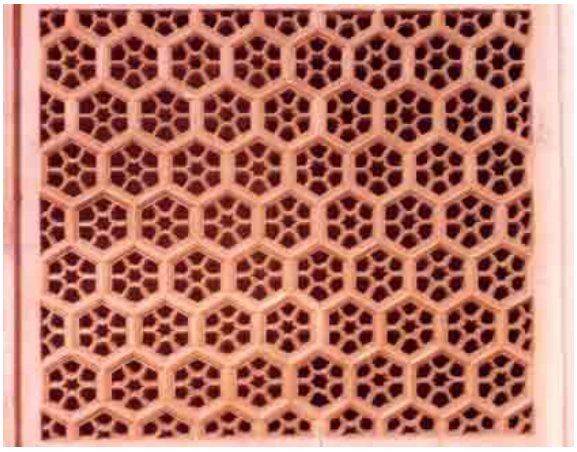
Figure 3 and 4 Floral Designs on Main Entrance of Tajmahal



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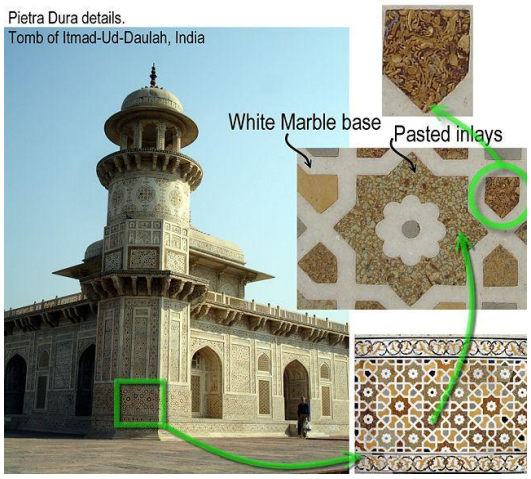

Figure 5 Geoometrical Designs & Jali Work in mughal Monuments of Agra

[3]Suncallmoonbright.com

[4]ghummakar-biswas.blogspot.co

[5]www.istockphoto.com

Figure 6 Various Carved and Designed Tiles used in the Monuments

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Figure 7 Hand Printed Designs Inspired by Mughal Monuments of Agra

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[6] en.wikipedia.org

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Figure 8 Designer Cushions Inspired by Inlay Work

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Figure 9 Fabrics Designed with Mughal Monumental Motifs for Various Uses

[8]www.coroflot.cpm

[9]www.craftsvilla.com

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Figure 10 Table Napkin Inspired by Jali Work

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Figure 41 Block Printing Inspired by Agra's Mughal Monumental Designs

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